

6A.

BALTIMORE SUN
3 February 1987

New Man at the CIA

In appointing Robert Gates to succeed William J. Casey as director of central intelligence, President Reagan is obviously trying to protect the CIA, as an institution, from some of the most damaging revelations of the Iran-contra scandal. As a hand-picked Casey associate and a CIA careerist — indeed, the first professional intelligence analyst ever to head the agency — Mr. Gates carries considerable baggage. But his professionalism is highly regarded on Capitol Hill, even by some liberal Democratic critics.

When the Gates appointment is stacked side by side with the installation of Frank C. Carlucci as director of the National Security Council, a pattern starts to take shape. An administration top-heavy in political appointees is putting its two most sensitive and implicated agencies in the protective arms of proven government servants. Messrs. Carlucci and Gates have both been deputy directors of the Central Intelligence Agency. The new CIA chief served six years at the NSC before his transfer back to Langley. So each knows intimately what the other is all about and may be disinclined to exacerbate longstanding turf rivalries.

If Mr. Gates encounters some early difficulties, it is because he is inevitably linked with controversial covert operations. How much he personally approved of such hijinks as the mining of Nicaraguan harbors or the diversion of Iran arms sale profits to the anti-Sandinista rebels has yet to be

revealed. It is reassuring that he objected to the sale of weaponry to Iran, warning it could tip the balance in the Iran-Iraq war and would damage U.S. interests.

As Mr. Casey bows out, a victim of brain cancer, he deserves credit for restoring some of the CIA's effectiveness after the devastations of Vietnam and Watergate and the neglect of the Carter administration. Particularly in Mr. Gates' specialty, intelligence analysis, progress was marked. One of the ironies of the past six years, however, was the bad luck encountered in covert operations by Bill Casey, a hero of the wartime OSS. A series of spy scandals seriously compromised U.S. intelligence operations in the Soviet Union; a lack of sources led to what may have been an over-reliance on Israeli intelligence in Iran. But Mr. Casey's passionate adherence to the Reagan Doctrine, which sanctions interventionism worldwide, contributed to an Iran-contra debacle that has the CIA again in retreat.

It will be Mr. Gates' job to safeguard his agency by insisting on prudence and due respect for the limits a squeamish democracy places on intelligence operations. These limits may, at times, be unwise or naive, when one considers the nature of our adversaries. But we hope Mr. Gates realizes that U.S. security is not well served by activities that can backfire, causing serious foreign policy setbacks or a loss of domestic support.